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Poetry in Response to the "Disengagement Plan": Identity, Poetics and Politics

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Abstract: This article will examine the corpus of poems written in the years 2004-2005, in response to the Israeli government's Disengagement plan that unilaterally evacuated all Israeli communities from Gush Katif in the southern Gaza Strip. These poems are explored as a political speech act, whose purpose is to bring about an extra-linguistic outcome: to impact upon the feelings and thoughts of the addressees, as well as to influence them in relation to issues of identity and social affiliation. Indeed, these poems are part of a long and complex tradition of Hebrew political poetry, characterized not only by a response to political events but also by poets' attempts to inspire change and shape attitudes—particularly regarding political issues that have moral implications. In this context of this tradition of political poetry, it could be assumed that the poetry written in response to the Disengagement plan would seek to participate in the extensive public protest and to bring about political change. I will argue, however, that this poetry was not political poetry, which sought to bring about an actual pragmatic change, but rather a type of political poetry that sought instead *to confront and to process* the implications of the anticipated political reality on an Israeli citizen's identity and consciousness.

Tamar WOLF-MONZON

Poetry in Response to the "Disengagement Plan": Identity, Poetics and Politics

This article will examine the corpus of poems written in the years 2004-2005, in response to the Israeli government's Disengagement plan that unilaterally evacuated all Israeli communities from Gush Katif in the southern Gaza Strip. These poems are explored as a political speech act, whose purpose is to produce an extra-linguistic outcome: to impact the feelings and thoughts of the addressees, as well as to influence them in relation to issues of identity and social affiliation. Indeed, these poems are part of a long and complex tradition of Hebrew political poetry, characterized not only by a response to political events but also by poets' attempts to inspire change and shape attitudes—particularly regarding political issues that have moral implications. Outstanding examples of this are Uri Zvi Grinberg's 1930 volume of poems *Ezor Magen U-Ne'um Ben Ha-Dam* (Protected area and the son of blood's speech) and Natan Alterman's 1948 poems *Magash Ha-Kesef* (The silver tray) and *Mesaviv La-Medurah* (Around the campfire). These works express the respective anger and pain about either the helplessness of the Jewish leadership in the light of the 1929 massacres of Jews in Hebron (in the case of Grinberg), or the nation's lack of appreciation for the forces fighting for Israeli independence (in the case of Alterman). A third example is the 1983 anthology *Ve'ein Tiḥlah Lakravot Velahereg: Shira Politit Bemilḥemet Levanon* (Fighting and killing without end: political poetry in the Lebanon war), which expressed deep moral distress at the circumstances that made it difficult for Israeli forces to maintain the army's code of the "purity of arms."

In this context of this tradition of political poetry, it could be assumed that the poetry written in response to the Disengagement plan would seek to participate in the extensive public protest and to bring about political change. I will argue, however, that this poetry was not political poetry, which sought to bring about an actual pragmatic change, but rather a type of political poetry that sought instead *to confront and to process* the implications of the anticipated political reality on an Israeli citizen's identity and consciousness. I will therefore first define the features of the political poem in general, and briefly present the political background for the writing of this specific type of political poetry. Subsequently, I will focus on the corpus of poems that took shape in various anthologies and collections by poets, most of whom are connected to *Mashiv Ha-Ruaḥ* (Makes the wind blow), a journal devoted to Jewish-Israeli poetry (discussed in studies by Alphi; Jacobson; Perry).

The political poem and its features

The political poem is a speech act that strives to actualize certain communicative purposes as it also arouses certain reactions in the addressee. In the terms of the philosopher J.L. Austin, the political poem both performs an act and brings about an extra-linguistic result that in some way influences the feelings, thoughts or opinions of the addressee. The political nature of the text is not determined by its contents, but rather by the fact of it being a type of political action that seeks to influence an extra-linguistic reality (Hever, *Reishit* 49-112; *Paytanim* 44-45). The speaker may invest considerable effort in shaping the message as effectively and compellingly as possible, and may use rhetorical manipulations and exploit the varied range of meanings of poetic language. If the addressee, however, is uncooperative and does not actualize the possibilities embodied in the text, the communicative process, at the center of which is the transmission of the message, fails. In other words, despite the addresser's efforts to design the message effectively, the responsibility for the success of the message in effecting a political act rests in the hands of the addressees and depends on their willingness to cooperate with the poem's messages.

I can note three types of addresses for the political poem. The first type is termed "positive addressees," those who support the speaker's political positions and actualize the various possibilities inherent in the text in political terms. In consequence, there occurs no genuine or profound process of change in thinking or shaping of views; rather, existing views are reinforced. The second type is termed the "neutral addressees," those who have not formulated a position on the political issue in question or are indifferent to it. In order to challenge these addressees' indifference, the addresser may need to employ various types of rhetorical manipulations. The success of the political action depends on the willingness of the neutral addressees to cooperate and relate to the text. The third type is termed the "negative addressees," those who reject the political positions reflected in the text, and their very willingness to read a text to whose messages they oppose can be considered a success of the political action.

The disengagement plan and its addressees

On December 18, 2003, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon presented his unilateral security initiative to disengage from the Palestinians. He chose to do so at the annual Herzliya Conference on the Balance of Israel's National Resilience and Security. Sharon addressed his appeal to the conference's organizers and participants:

> During the past three days, you have been discussing Israel's situation. I, as Prime Minister, am responsible for the planning and implementation of the measures that will shape Israel's character in the next few years….However, if in a few months the Palestinians still continue to disregard their part in implementing the Roadmap (President Bush's peace plan) then Israel will initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians. (Israeli PM Sharon's Speech)

Who were the addressees Sharon targeted in his speech? First and foremost, positive addressees, the journalists and public opinion makers who supported his plan from the moment it was presented. This included the readers of the strongly left-leaning newspaper *Haaretz*, whose website printed the full text of the speech. The statement, "The process of disengagement will lead to an improvement in the quality of life and will help strengthen the Israeli economy" may have been written for the ears of the neutral addressees to draw their attention to the benefits of the plan. In his speech, Sharon did not relate directly to the negative addressees, the settlers of Gush Katif, those who would be directly impacted by his plan. Through rhetorical manipulation, however, he indirectly hinted at the anticipated resistance to the plan: "My life experience has taught me that for peace, as well as for war, we must have a broad consensus. We must preserve our unity, even in the midst of an incisive internal debate."

On 2 February 2004, Sharon gave an exclusive interview to journalist Yoel Marcus of *Haaretz* (Marcus 1) to explain the plan's importance. Sharon apparently chose *Haaretz* not only as a channel to convey his message, but also as a "focus group" of positive addressees. At the same time, his choice of this newspaper demonstrated that he was ignoring the negative addressees, the residents of Gush Katif, most of whom were not among *Haaretz*'s readership and who in the past were closely identified with Sharon and his views. Many of the leading journalists and opinion makers in the print and electronic media overwhelmingly supported the disengagement plan and delegitimized the settlers of Gush Katif and their struggle—as testified to by David Landau, *Haaretz*'s editor-in-chief (Meir and Rahav-Meir 61-93). In over two-thousand articles, these journalists predicted that the settlers' struggle would turn to armed resistance, ultimately leading to civil war (Keshev; Roth 360-365). Although the settlers' leaders made it clear that they would not use physical violence during the evacuation of Gush Katif, harsh criticism was levelled against them for undermining Israel's democracy by attempting to thwart a parliamentary decision (Sheleg 46). After the disengagement plan was approved by the Israeli parliament in March 2005, a tenacious campaign was waged by its opponents (Reichner 102-170). A particularly striking event was a march on 18 July 2005, in which tens of thousands of marchers found themselves surrounded by a large contingent of army and police. The decision by the protest's leaders not to allow any violence against these forces was a transformative event that epitomized the struggle's nonviolent nature and proved the journalists' dire predictions wrong.

Yet all such efforts to prevent the disengagement plan from being implemented failed. On 23 August 2005, six days after the start of the evacuation of the 1,751 Israeli families living in Gaza Strip, security forces completed the implementation of the plan and all the Israeli settlements were destroyed. The political struggle against the disengagement plan widely resonated in the Israeli cultural discourse. This article will focus on the role played by poetry in the political discourse against the disengagement, and its impact on the shaping of Israeli opinion concerning issues of identity and social unity.

"Orange Dawn" and its Addressees: From the Herzliya Speech to the Act of Evacuation

Opponents of the disengagement chose as a sign of their struggle the color orange, from the flag of the Gaza Coast Regional Council; this color was conspicuous in the T-shirts worn by the protesters, as well as in protest signs, bracelets and ribbons tied to cars. It was also reflected in the titles of the books documenting the struggle against disengagement, such as: *Orange Days*, *Orange Dawn* and *The Orange Campaign*. For example, *Shaḥar Katom* (Orange Dawn; Ben Basat and Recanati) documents the struggle against the evacuation, from Sharon's Herzliya speech to the evacuation itself; it includes photographs, newspaper articles, excerpts of minutes of meetings and poetry and prose, all arranged chronologically. The images that document the events are the essence of the book, rather than the verbal texts, edited and gathered by Elhanan Nir. The poems serve as an illustration for the pictures, but sometimes subverts them. One interesting poem is "Tiyul Ba-Arets Kaṭif Shavu'a Ahare Ha-Ḥurban" (A trip to the land of

Katif one week after the destruction), written by Ḥ. Roth. This is composed as an imagined way of contending with the trauma of the evacuation:

> I returned to visit after the death of the homes
> I emerged with a few insights
> The most important one: I finally saw
> What single-family detached homes are
> And even more important –
> That they all look exactly alike
> After the soul has left them. (Ben Basat and Recanati 233)

The phrase "single-family detached homes" is associated in the Israeli mind with the fulfillment of the bourgeois dream to own a private home with a garden. In the poem, the phrase takes on a sarcastic meaning: the houses are detached because they have been destroyed and crushed by the bulldozers. The poem appears to address its negative addressees, those who do not identify with the struggle against the Disengagement plan. The ironic utterance, which evokes the experience of the destruction and a disturbing sense of discomfort in the negative addressees, neither embellishes the reality nor attempts to blur its difficulties. Rather, this utterance addresses this reality critically from a position of moral strength. It can therefore be argued that the self-irony is not an end in of itself, but rather a therapeutic tool that allows the speaker to cope with the trauma of the evacuation and destruction.

In this volume Nahum Pachnik also utilizes irony in his untitled poem in order to evoke the experience of destruction:

> Let us summon you now a bride filled with yearning
> Let us glorify you and caress you as our bodies are destroyed
> And our synagogues are blackened with soot
> Imploded into themselves (...) (Ben Basat and Recanati 58)

The poem clearly references the Jewish liturgical poem "Azamer Besvaḥin" (I will sing in praise) by R. Isaac Luria, sung during the Friday night meal, which compares the Sabbath to a bride: "Let us summon her now / A new table we lay for her (...) and between them a bride / adorned in jewels"). Pachunik uses these descriptions to provide an ironic portrayal of the razed and blackened Gush Katif. The use of the monorhyme "kisuf*in* – ḥarev*in* – umefuyaḥ*in* – kerus*in*" associates the poem with this liturgical poem that uses the same monorhyme at the end of each line.

Who are Pachnik's addressees? The reference to "I will sing in praise" clearly addresses those opposed to the destruction of the Jewish community, who are familiar with the liturgical poem, and can thus detect the piercing irony embodied in its use. In addition, scathing criticism is subsequently levelled at the Rabbis who pledged that the disengagement plan would never be implemented: "What will be our fate, our rabbi, valiant as a lion for broken promises / Almost Supreme God were you in my childhood." The criticism is mainly levelled at Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, who served as Israel's Chief Sephardic Rabbi. His words on the eve of the disengagement—"It will not happen; this is a prayer and with God's help also a determination of reality"—was a perlocutionary act whose results were extra-linguistic, as many of the settlers and their leaders followed his words blindly, believing that they represented the truth.

On the Disengagement Collection: From Protest to Lamentation

It is important to look at the special issue of Mashiv Ha-Ruaḥ, *Al Ha-Hitnatkut* (On the disengagement; Oz, Antabi and Klein), in which the movement from protest to lamentation is highlighted. This is accomplished by redefining disengagement as a universal human and cultural experience. Disengagement is thereby interpreted as an unsettling emotional concept, which impacts the stability of both personal and national identities. Among the voices in the collection, contradictory ones were included. Thus poems of the poet and editor Tal Nitzan, "Agalah im Susah" (A cart with a horse) and "Kisuy" (Cover) (10-11), do not deal with the pain of the Gush Katif settlers, but rather with the suffering of their Arab neighbors in Rafah. At the center of the poems of poet and translator Yael Globerman, "Ha-Shalom Hu Oved Zar" (Peace is a foreign worker) and "Śderot" (Avenue) (26-29), is an examination of the experience of foreignness and alienation in Israeli society in regard to foreign workers and Holocaust survivors. Two other intriguing poems, "Itamar Mitnateḳ" (Itamar disengages) and "Sippur Ha-Hitnatkut Sheli" (The story of my disengagement) (12-13) were written by Yossi Sarid, a quintessential leftist. Sarid's poems describe the emotional and mental implications of the concept of disengagement, by respectively observing a child who sobs every morning in his new kindergarten, and through the words of an athlete who is disqualified when he breaks rules. In both poems, therefore, the

concept of "disengagement" is synonymous with rupture, a feeling of disconnection and the experience of disqualification without a political connection.

Poetry collections that seek to effect political action usually offer an unequivocal, and shared, political stance. The inclusion of texts by authors who identify with opposing political views is both unusual and surprising. This can also be perceived as the editors' search for the symbolic and even mystical essence of the disengagement, rather than a pursuit of its interpretation as a political concept. *On the Disengagement* is structured so as to appeal simultaneously to addressees of different types, both opponents and supporters of the disengagement plan. This complexity is a characteristic of the *Mashiv Ha-Ruaḥ* group, which seeks to use poetry to find connections to Israeli society, precisely in those places characterized by disagreement (Jacobson 30-36).

The editors' introduction to this collection appears under the Hebrew heading *Mikra'a* (Anthology), deliberately misspelled to echo both the Hebrew word for reader as well as a word indicating the rending of clothing by a person grieving for the death of a family member or upon seeing the destruction of Jewish settlement (*Babylonian Talmud*, Moed Katan 26a). The latter, metaphorical, meaning associates the term with the semantic system of mourning similar to that over the destruction of the Jerusalem Temples. The fact that the evacuation of the Israeli settlements in Gush Katif occurred the day after Tisha Be'Av (the ninth day of the month of 'Av)—that commemorates the destruction of both Jerusalem Temples—draws a clear analogy between these events and the destruction of the settlements. This resonates in various poems written during the period of the disengagement, both thematically as well as through the use of rhetorical and tonal patterns from the biblical *Book of Lamentations*, which is recited on Tisha Be-'Av. The editors' introduction concludes by stating: "The collection of disconnections is also the collection of connections. Every connection/disconnection switches on a red light. Poetry can do no more than that. May the poems be your red lights, as a rending for the Children of Israel (Oz, Antabi and Klein 3). The title may be understood, on the one hand, as a subversive act by the editors themselves, who cast doubt on the ability of the collected poems to actually bring about change on the political, pragmatic level. Yet, on the other hand, the title may be interpreted as shifting the focus from a modus of protest to one of lamentation.

The Cycle of Poems Invitation to Cry: Trauma, Weeping and Lamentation

Lamentation is a genre that expresses grief and mourning for an individual or group, in wake of a physical or emotional loss, many times following death or destruction. This genre is also characterized by words of praise for the deceased or for the place that was destroyed, and by expressions of sorrow and lament for their loss, alongside the display of the state of mourning by means of physical signs (rending one's garment, placing ashes on one's head, crying and wailing). In stylistic-rhetorical terms, the lamentation is characterized by repetitive syntactic structures and repeated tonal elements that echo weeping. The *Book of Lamentations* is considered the representative textual model of the genre of public lamentation (Horowitz 47-49*). Hazmanah Le-Bekhi* (Invitation to cry), Elihaz Cohen's cycle of poems (2005) maps out feelings and fears that arose in the poetic speaker from the inception of the disengagement plan until close to its implementation, ultimately turning to this genre of lamentation.

The title clearly evokes a trenchant article "Hazmanah Le-Bekhi," written by Arnon Lapid, a member of Kibbutz Givat Ḥayim Iḥud. This was published in *Igeret*, the weekly newspaper of the United Kibbutz Movement, and subsequently in *Davar* (the newspaper of the Israeli Labor Federation). The publication of the article just after the end of the Yom Kippur War (October 1973) caused an uproar in light of the subsequent social crisis. In this article, Lapid not only expresses a courageous approach to coping with the loss of close friends, but also a feeling of disgust and anger with the leaders who disappointed the Israeli public:

> I want to send you an invitation to cry. The exact day or hour are not important, but the evening's program, I promise, will be compelling: Crying (...) Together we will cry about the dreams we have woken up from, the great things that have become small, the gods who failed and the false prophets who have risen to greatness. About the tastelessness, the reluctance, the powerlessness (...) about the illusions that were shattered, about the theories that proved to be baseless, the truths that were discovered to be lies (...) and we will pity ourselves, because we are deserving of pity…. (Lapid 42)

While Lapid's article was written by a soldier who had returned from the battlefield, Cohen's poem was written as an imagined appeal to a soldier who comes to evacuate the speaker and his family from their home:

> Come in, sit with us as mourners sit, taste the round pretzels

Like the children who now too are rolling on the carpet like
Fate, again make homes in Etsion riddled with holes and hollow
In silence, we will walk for the last time among the rooms of the house:
Only you and I and the walls remember quarrels and lovemaking
Lines written and erased as if seared into the Book of Life
In your eyes, my good soldier, I will see a tear, our friends choking with
Tears, the poet wrote in '48, perhaps now we may cry (...) (Cohen 8)

While Cohen lived in the settlements of the Etsion Bloc (located directly south of Jerusalem), these lines reflect his fear of their future evacuation against the backdrop of the looming implementation of the Disengagement plan. The imminent evacuation brings to the surface the images seared in the collective traumatic memory of the evacuation of the children, mothers and pregnant women from the Etsion Bloc during the Israeli War of Independence (1948). The phrase "Our friends are choking with tears" is taken from Haim Guri's well-known poem, "Behold, our bodies are laid out," written about a detachment of soldiers who were killed as they were on their way to bring food and medical supplies to residents of the besieged Etsion Bloc. In this manner, Cohen creates a link among four traumatic events: the evacuation of women and children from the Etsion Bloc in early January 1948; the story of the soldiers, which occurred two weeks later; the Yom Kippur War, to which the phrase "Invitation to Cry" alludes; and the imminent threat of the uprooting of the settlements in the Gaza Strip (which indeed occurred six months later). All these traumatic events are accompanied by the poet's paralyzing and primordial fear that he, too, may be expelled from his home in the Etsion Bloc.

The speaker's attitude toward the soldier ordered to evacuate him is characterized by a language associated with intimate physical contact, as well as a sense of closeness and belonging ("my good soldier"). The soldier does not stand beyond the threshold, but is made part of the intimate separation of the family from its home. By doing so, Cohen subverts the possibility of a civil war, which at the time lay at the center of public discourse, while at the same time ruling out the possibility of positioning the soldier as an object of protest. The invitation to cry is realized, but in reverse: the soldier falls on the evacuee's neck and bitterly weeps, while the poetic speaker comforts him and encourages him to weep:

In a whisper you ask: Have you packed? As if the box contains a world
So filled with longing
You stop in a flood of tears. We go out for a breath of air on the porch
This is where I've prepared a small corner for myself to write the unfinished novel
And now the last leaf falls from the fig tree in the yard
Everything is replete with symbols you say
Falling on my neck in tears weeping and embittered,
My devoted soldier, my good soldier, now it is finally permitted to cry. (Cohen 9)

The words of reassurance, "now it is finally permitted to cry" allude to the poem by Natan Alterman, "Mother, May I Cry Now?" (*Davar* 2). In a subsequent edition of the poem published in 1948 (22-23), Alterman added a quotation from the poet Abba Kovner: "Asked the little girl after emerging from the hiding place upon the liberation." According to Guri, Kovner told him that during World War II, when the Jewish children who were hiding from the Nazis in the forest near Vilnius, Lithunia saw the partisans in their uniforms after the liberation, they were frightened because they thought they were German soldiers. He heard a little girl asking her mother in Yiddish: "Mama, may I cry now?" For she had not been permitted to cry throughout the eleven months of hiding, lest the sound give them away. Kovner apparently told Alterman the story, who transformed it into his famous poem (Gilula 339).

The analogy to the little girl in Alterman's poem, and to the feelings of fear, confusion and muteness that burst out from her precisely at the time of the liberation, illuminate the soldier in a fragile and vulnerable light. Though he has not come to destroy, he finds himself in a complex situation. As did the child who stifled her tears, he also chokes back his tears because of the role he has been given. Only at the poem's end do the tears burst out without restraint, when the soldier "falls on my neck in tears weeping and bitterly." By deconstructing the collocation "weeping and embittered," the speaker helps the soldier vent his accumulated emotions.

"Hazmanah Le-Bekhi" (Invitation to Cry) appeared as an appendix to Cohen's book *Listen God*. The subtitle of the volume, "Poems of the Events of 2001-2004," reflects the harsh impact of the Second Palestinian Intifada (uprising). At the same time, it is evident that the poet himself is ambivalent about the extent to which his poetry is political, as well as about the very fact of his desire to write poetry that positions political action at its center. "How do you write poetry when everything around you is bleeding?" wrote Cohen at the end of his book under the heading, "To hold time by the hair and shake

it" (Cohen 65). Cohen refrains, however, from defining his poetry as political: "May the heavens and the earth be my witness that the poems collected in this book have almost nothing to do with politics. There is a very personal effort to unite with this bare sorrow of the 'Jewish fate.'"

Cohen's poetry is also aware of the limits of its ability to effect and influence political reality an. In the cycle of poems "Hazmana Le-Bekhi," the focus shifts from a modus of protest aimed at preventing the decreed disengagement to a mode of lamentation, at the center of which is weeping and the need for empathy about an anticipated loss. Whereas Lapid's article sought to defy and challenge the Israeli political and military leadership of the Yom Kippur War, Cohen's poem focuses on the emotional proximity and experiences of grief shared by the poetic speaker and the soldier. Clinging longingly to images and scenes of the past is typical of the genre of lamentation poetry, as it evokes a pleasant past associated with pastoral images:

> We lay down in green pastures and again played
> The game of hide and seek of
> The Poem of Poems (...)
> And I would take you running above the cemetery
> To here, on a Shabbat afternoon (...) (15)

"Poems Written in the Sand" is a cycle of three poems, which revels in memories of the landscapes of Gush Katif as it evokes the sea, sands, tranquility and quiet. At the same time, this cycle also laments their disappearance, utilizing biblical allusions to the biblical hymn "Poem of the Sea" (Shirat Hayam) sung by the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea in safety, as well as to the prophet Jonah's prayer while he was in the bowels of the whale:

> I saw the sea lament in Poem of the Sea
> This strip of blue torn
> From my eyes
> In the cement wall
> A little girl's doll washed to the shore. All your breakers and waves
> And like then, in the poem,
> Hashem will reign for ever and ever. (Cohen 16)

The community of Shirat Hayam was given this name because it was established in February 2001, close to the Sabbath when this hymn is recited in the synagogue. In Cohen's poem, instead of singing praises, the sea laments the impending destruction of the nearby communities. It is striking that these poems contain no attempt at protest or political action aimed at bringing about change. The sea sand, which serves as the canvas for the writing of the poems, is fragile and ephemeral, just as the ability of the poems to effect a change and leave their mark is both limited and tenuous. Similarly, the sea—instead of protesting the imminent evacuation—laments the torn strip of blue.

"Ten journeys" by Sivan Har-Shefi: Lamentation of the Individual and Lamentation of the Public

Sivan Har-Shefi's cycle of poems, "*Eser Masa'ot*" (Ten journeys), in the collection *Tehilim Leyom Ra'ash (*Psalms for a Noisy Day; 81-93) describes ten degrees of separation from Gush Katif. Similar to Cohen's poems, Har-Shefi's poems were written before the disengagement, when the Gush Katif settlements still existed. Consequently, this is not a lamentation in the usual sense—that is, one that looks back on the past and mourns a loss—but rather poetry that describes an imagined occurrence and gives it substance, in order to prepare the psyche to cope with an expected loss (Hirsch). While the poems do not protest the anticipated evacuation and do not seek to change the political reality, they also do not imagine the possibility of a miracle that will cancel the impending evacuation.

Two quotations are cited as a motto for this cycle. The first refers to the building of the Temple during the period of King Solomon: "And the house, when it was being built, was built of stone made ready before it was brought there" (I *Kings* 6:7)—meaning that during the Temple's construction, no iron vessels were wielded on its stones so as not to mar its sanctity (*Yalkut Shimoni* on I Kings, 247/182). The Hebrew word *masa* (journey) is interpreted in the Midrash (medieval Jewish commentary), as a miracle: "The stone would travel by itself and rise up and be built on its own" (*Pesikta Rabbati* [Ish Shalom edition] Pesikta 6). The second quotation describes the departure of the Divine Presence from the Temple in ten stages: "Ten journeys did the Divine Presence travel from cherub to cherub, and from cherub to the threshold of the Temple, and from the threshold of the Temple to the

cherubim, and from the cherubim to the ancient gate, from the ancient gate to the courtyard, from the courtyard to the roof, from the roof to the altar, from the alter to the wall, from the wall to the city, from the city to the Mount of Olives." (81). On each journey, the Divine Presence tries anew to awaken the people of Israel to repent and avert the evil decree. The analogy between the nation going into exile and the Divine Presence that empathizes with it, reflects the way in which the Rabbis dealt with the future destruction of Jerusalem and the anticipated exile, as well as with the aspiration for hope and consolation in the future. The construction of the Temple, and the manner in which the Divine Presence departed from it, together offer a prism for understanding the building and destruction of a human home. This analogy between the destruction of the Temple and the anticipated destruction of Gush Katif structures the home as a sacred and symbolic space. Moreover, this is accompanied by a process of physical exile that emerges as a process of spiritual exile on both a personal and national level.

Har-Shefi explores this experience of separation from three perspectives: a woman's internal perspective; a cosmic perspective possessing mythical features; and a sober national perspective. Together, these three perspectives make it possible to address the uprooting and exile from one's home, as well as the sense of alienation that takes possession of the home and its inhabitants. On the eve of the evacuation, the first journey begins inside the home, in the most intimate place shared by the couple:

From right to left in the double bed,
I toss and turn and breathe in deeply our dreams
Those that we will leave behind.
From your side to mine
From the smell of your body to the smell of mine
That we will leave behind.
The days of disengagement fell on the days of my banishment,
In the place where I prayed and let my bed be whole before you
The crack widens,
A languid palm drops
The beginning of farewell. (Har Shefi 82)

The couple's mental and emotional journey is analogous to that of the Divine Presence, whose first stop is "from cherub to cherub." The image of the cherubim, which according to the Talmud were "intertwined with one another" (*Yoma* 54a-b), symbolized the intimate relationship between God and the people of Israel. Understanding the exile as an expression of the violation of the intimacy between the Divine Presence and the Jewish people has served previously as an inspiration for a chain of analogies, each of which is based on some form of disengagement—the disengagement between a couple during the monthly days of separation (a woman's menstrual cycle), and the separation of the residents of Gush Katif from their homes because of the Disengagement plan. The relaxation of power also takes on a pragmatic significance, because of the inability to block out the sense of alienation that penetrates the home. "In the place where I prayed and let my bed be whole before you"—the homophonic identity between "my bed" (*miṭati*) and "my death" (*mitati*) associates the separation with the experience of death and finality.

The entire reality of the couple's life is left behind, like the relationship between the Divine Presence and the people of Israel after the Exile from the Temple and Jerusalem. The impending evacuation from Gush Katif indicates that it is subsequently occupied by the "hard space," and especially the alienation that takes over the home and the speaker herself. Moreover, the motif of the "strange hand" is attributed to external figures who penetrate the private and intimate space, but also to a feeling of self-alienation that the speaker feels within her own home. Thus the fourth poem in the cycle begins with a journey from the living room to the kitchen, a journey in which a "breaking the vessels" occurs:

From the living room to the kitchen
The vessels broke
I gather up the fragments with my own hands
Such a sharp pain:
Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Is it a house in vain?
The path that has been paved to the sea,
The blooming hothouses
And perhaps

None of this ever existed? (Har Shefi 83)

While packing in preparation for the evacuation, dishes were moved and the speaker collects the shards of those that were broken. The "breaking of the vessels" is seen as an accident, but the primary allusion is to the mystical-Kabbalistic meanings that lend a dimension of mythic shock to this term. In Lurianic Kabbalah, "the breaking of the vessels" expresses a catastrophe that occurred in the lower worlds, when the vessels created to hold the divine light were unable to contain its powerful emanation. This catastrophe was not an accident, but rather part of the divine plan to purify these worlds and purge them of evil. When the vessels broke, scattering the divine sparks, there was an exile of the Divine Presence to the upper worlds, which manifested itself in the exile of the Jewish people from their land. This mythical process frames the exile as a symbolic reality that will lead to rectification—the separation of the sparks of light from the impurity and ultimate return to their divine source, that is, the return of the people of Israel to its land.

This, therefore, is another explanation of the description of the "Ten Journeys" of the Divine Presence at the time of the Jewish people going into exile, which attests to the continuing affinity between them. Whereas on the realistic level, the breaking of the vessels on the journey from the living room to the kitchen is interpreted as an accident, from a mythical perspective it is interpreted as part of the divine plan to purify the worlds and purge them of the evil that had entered them:

And again my finger is on the switch
Let there be darkness.
And the light slips away from the rooms,
Departs like blood from the body.
All the lamps are now
Closed gold. (Har Shefi 85)

"The light slips away from the rooms" marks the act of departing from home, while at the same time also symbolizing the light that was hidden because of the breaking of the vessels, which in the future will arise from the darkness. The verse from *Psalms* 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain," is perceived as the emptying of the Divine presence from the home, an emptying that casts doubt on its very existence. Thus Har-Shefi subsequently writes of the most striking achievements and symbols of Gush Katif communities:

Is it a house in vain?
The path that has been paved to the sea,
The blooming hothouses
And perhaps / None of this ever existed?" (90)

The concept of a home becomes a vain concept; this is an experience of crisis, shock, confusion and helplessness. At the same time, however, it makes it possible to rationalize the future destruction of the communities based on a broader mythical and more profound interpretation that allows the eventual prospect of rectification.

In the tenth and final poem, the speaker turns to the sea, the most quintessential symbol of Gush Katif, because water has healing powers. She seeks to learn about the possibility of rectification from the sea:

I approach the sea.
As our rabbis teach us,
If you throw a stone into the sea, and it is not known that it has entered it.
If a fast boat tears a strip through the water, it will immediately be healed.
Water has the fastest rectification,
Let it teach us.
Or at least cause the salt on all my wounds
To sing a song of praise
While the works of my hands are drowning. (91)

The phrase "As our rabbis teach us" is typical of proems that introduces halachic responsa or homilies. The textual infrastructure for the affinity between knowledge and the sea can be found in the last verse of the *Tashlikh* prayer (from the verb "to throw"), recited on the Jewish New Year, to symbolically represent the casting away of sins into the sea: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the

Lord as the waters cover the sea" (*Isaiah* 11:9). The sea is portrayed as the source of the explanations for the home's demolition, as well as an element in the search for physical and spiritual rectification. The expression "the works of my hand are drowning" alludes to the Midrash, which explains that as long as the Israelites were still in danger of drowning in the Red Sea, the Lord did not allow the angels to sing poems of praise (*Exodus Rabbah* 23:7). Har-Shefi's poem thus refers to the literal, physical achievements of Gush Katif that will be consigned to the sand of the Gaza shore by the Disengagement plan. Her departure is ultimately framed by means of the pragmatic question "How will I close my home":

> How will I close my home?
> With a lock?
> With a prayer?
> With a plea for forgiveness?
> Or will I leave the gate wide open and say
> You are hereby permitted
> To anyone
> And will lock only gates of tears. (92)

The text engages in a dialogue with the *Ne'ila* prayer (from the word closing) recited at the end of the Yom Kippur day of fasting (with the plea to "Open the gates of heaven"), as well as with the Jewish ceremony of divorce, when the husband places the writ of divorce in the wife's hands and says to her: "You are hereby permitted to anyone." Whereas the *Ne'ila* prayer symbolizes an affinity and intimacy between an individual and their Creator, the divorce ceremony conveys a sense of emotional coldness, an absence of intimacy and an act of disengagement. There is consequently a deliberate associative-linguistic affinity between the divorce ceremony and the use of the Hebrew term *girush*—meaning both expulsion and divorce—used by the residents of Gush Katif when referring to the disengagement. For they argued that the use of emotionally-neutral terms, such as evacuation or disengagement, lent political legitimacy to this act. That is why they preferred alternative terms such as uprooting or expulsion—with all the harsh emotional baggage they bear—to express a political process imposed from above by virtue of a legal injunction.

Does Har-Shefi wish to effect political action here, even though the term "expulsion" is not explicitly mentioned in the poem? Ostensibly, the fluctuation between the prayer's emotional content and that of the divorce ceremony raises the possibility of political action. Thus she subsequently writes:

> Shall I set fire to all its windows
> Shall I scream Let me die with your pillars
> and they will pluck me from the roof with arms of iron (93)

This strong dramatic option, however, with its provocative allusion to the biblical Samson's act of revenge against the Philistines (*Judges* 16: 30), may change the reader's expectations but is not actualized. Har-Shefi's cycle of poems concludes with a direct citation from the proem to the Midrashic commentary on the biblical *Book of Lamentations* concerning the ten journeys of the Divine Presence: "When the Divine Presence departed from the Temple, it would return and kiss the walls of the Temple and the pillars of the Temple and weep and say: Farewell my Temple, farewell palace, farewell precious house, farewell my Temple, farewell" (Proem to Midrash Lamentations Rabba).

This final quote thus strongly favors the mode of lamentation over the option of taking political action. Repetition is one of the most striking rhetorical features of the lamentation. Its use by Har-Shefi comprises not only an expression of farewell while in a state of emotional turmoil, but also means to accentuate—especially in the difficult and painful context of the evacuation from Gush Katif—the central value of peace. Relinquishing the political struggle and accepting the impending expulsion are not the result of political submission, but rather of the desire to focus on the complex significance of destruction and on the subsequent process of rectification. The final farewell takes on a symbolic meaning for Har-Shefi, as it moves from the political dimension to that of identity. For the full actualization of this cycle of poems is based both on the expectations that correspond to the cultural and social identities from which Har-Shefi comes and on her wide textual range. Nevertheless, the choice of the mode of lamentation as an alternative to political action enables even the negative addressees, those who support the disengagement plan, to focus on the poetic quality of the text as well as on the personal questions it raises.

Tsir Kissufim: Prayer Instead of Political Protest

Lastly, I would like to turn to the volume *Tsir Kissufim: Prayers for the Land of Israel* (Levinger, Nir and Raziel). This is a compilation of prayers written in workshops held in Gush Katif during the period between the declaration of the disengagement plan and its implementation, as a way of dealing therapeutically with the distress of the upcoming evacuation. The words of Rabbi Ya'akov Ariel, the chief rabbi of the city of Ramat Gan, in the prologue to this volume, attribute explicit political significance to the prayers: "May the verse overturn the curse, and may the poem cancel the uprooting and may those who are happy to dwell in Your house remain in their home." Nevertheless, the purpose of the volume's editors appears to be different: to turn the political protest into prayer:

> For a year and a half, the people of Zion have been concerned with the question of the disengagement and the heart is wounded. And when the heart is wounded and in pain, torn between the convolutions of God and man, it must make its voice heard, and how good it is if these are voices of prayer and supplication. Many of us have long felt that prayer and invocation, the glory of many generations, are very much needed now, and when disputes, vociferation and contention prevail, nothing can better purify the heart of its indignity, to continue the pain to the Lord of the Universe, and to ask Him spread over us His canopy of peace. (Levinger, Nir and Raziel 5)

The prayers are mostly unsigned, with the authors listed only at the book's end—thereby providing the appearance of a prayer-book. Well-known prayers by poets and Rabbis from throughout Jewish history are added, so as to combine topical prayers with the longing of all generations. The texts as a whole appeal to God as the driver of the historical process, and as the One who uses politicians, soldiers and journalists to actualize it in a way that is interpreted by the writers as the "hiding of God's Face." At the same time, God is also the addressee of the prayers, a model reader who deciphers the prayers' codes. This volume also contains an indirect appeal to the positive addressees, the settlers of Gush Katif, most of whom shared a religious identity as well as the values and norms embodied in these prayers.

The conversion of the concrete-political discourse into prayer and supplication is expressed in the discrepancy between the two meanings of the title *Tsir Kissufim*. The first is the referential meaning, the Kissufim route—the name used for the central artery of traffic between Gush Katif communities and the Israeli side of the security fence surrounding the Gaza Strip. The second is the emotive meaning of the combination of the phrase *Tsir Kissufim*, whose words also mean "throes of yearning," thus expressing the worshiper's desire to address God. This shift to the emotional facet does not cancel out the referential significance of the phrase, but rather accentuates the difference between the two meanings, as well as the preference for the psycho-emotional aspect over the concrete-political one.

Conclusion

The corpus of poems written during the period of the disengagement calls for a rethinking of the concept of "political poetry," its purpose and the criteria for assessing its degree of success. Most of the poems were written during the public and political struggle to prevent the Disengagement plan. Yet in pragmatic terms, these poems failed to achieve their political goal. Unlike the active role poetry played in the opposition to the First Lebanon War (1982), they did not lead to a rethinking of the Disengagement plan, nor did they provoke a wave of opposition. The majority of these poems protested against the experience of detachment felt by the people of Gush Katif from the rest of the nation, as well as the sense of alienation that took over their private space. In many poems, "disengagement" was explored not as a political term, but rather as an experiential concept involving a lack of identity and affiliation. In many of the poems, the focus was shifted to a mode of lamentation, focused the need for emotional empathy during trauma and loss. In other poems, such as those in the *Tsir Kissufim* collection, political discourse was replaced by prayer that centered on supplication.

As Yochai Oppenheimer writes, poetry written by people with right-wing sympathies tends to place at its center a vision with mythological features (Oppenheimer 9-12). This is because the design of a symbolic space based on mythology makes it possible for these poets to focus on the spiritual and emotional significance of the described situations, and not only on their pragmatic-political aspects. Thus, both Cohen and Har-seek to clarify the meaning of "home" and how it defines one's self-identity, as well as both the meaning of the destruction and the subsequent spiritual value of rectification. Moreover, many of these poems are characterized by an intensive use of Jewish textual sources and an intertextual dialogue with Hebrew writings throughout the ages. The world of these poets, together with their socio-cultural identity, has thus provided them a profound acquaintance with the linguistic and symbolic possibilities that have been preserved for generations in Hebrew religious writings.

All translations of the Hebrew and Jewish sources are my own.

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